

The novel *Generation X* had several references to nuclear war. Since the book came out in 1991- literally when the Soviet Union dissolved- there's a seeming disconnect of the characters' annihilation obsessions with the immediate concerns of those times. The plot makes more sense by considering the delay between the story conception and the book release. The novel was successful in affixing a moniker to a demographic group which didn't want one. Another aim of the book was apparently to get people to start using new terms like:

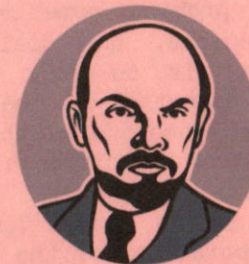
"OBSCURISM- the practice of peppering daily life with obscure references (forgotten films, dead TV stars, unpopular books, defunct countries, etc.) as a subliminal means of showcasing both one's education and one's wish to disassociate from the world of mass culture"



Recognize more of my obscurism when I next cover futurist visions from the 90s.

Worst Future Ever!

1: THE RED MENACE!



Lenin



"I must break you"- Drago

How might the entire world turn out entirely for the worse? Environmental degradation seems to be a common concern. Still, in the past a global communist take-over by the Soviet Union was an overwhelming fixation for people.

So how did this "Red Menace" manifest itself? For just America alone, there were the McCarthy hearings, the Korean War, the Bay of Pigs, the Cuban Missile Crisis, the Vietnam War, the Iran-Contra affair, and other Central and South American interventions.

All the same, the primary focus of this journal is how people imagined the future would turn out for the worse. To this end the predictions of futurists will be reviewed. Plus, fictional artifacts from American culture will be scrutinized, including everything from the television miniseries *Amerika*, to movies like *Brazil*.

More than probing sometimes obscure futurist sources, one goal of *Worst Future Ever!* is to show how I was personally affected by these visions when I first encountered them. I hope this method will distinguish itself from other reference materials' summaries. So go forth Comrade, and read in preparation for the imminent international workers' revolution!



Issue #1 of WFE!

Amerika (1987)

Allegedly the TV miniseries *Amerika* was created as a reaction to the perceived pacifism of *The Day After*. The series is about the occupation of America by the Soviet Union.

Here are aspects of the series that I remember (accurately I hope):

(1) The story's setting was a place with geographic boundaries redrawn so that the administrative unit combined states like Iowa, Nebraska, and the Dakotas.

(2) Eric Bogosian, or some guy who looked like him, acted as a kind of disc jockey / agent provocateur in one episode, whipping kids into a frenzy at a "rave" and afterwards the kids destroyed a police car. The DJ may have been an agent of the occupiers so the kids can blow off steam without threatening the established order.

(3) Kris Kristofferson is tortured by the authorities. When he is released, another person begins hugging him, and he can't raise his arms to hug back.

The last aspect really affected me at the time. This raises the matter that this journal's sometimes mocking of futurist visions about the Soviet Union is in no way meant to downplay the lack of human rights for the people who have lived under a communist regime.

The Day After (1984)

When I saw the TV special *The Day After* as a kid, it totally scared the Hell out of me. I hadn't really seen anything scary up to that point, except once when I stumbled upon a broadcast of *Psycho* airing on Chicago's WGN in the middle of the day.

The show starts off with a nuclear conflict between the East and the West. Three hundred nuclear missiles hit the United States. The focus of the story is how the residents of one town persevere in the aftermath.



The Day After also addresses the issue of a "nuclear winter". This concept maintains that following nuclear strikes resulting in particulates being sent into the air, the weather would change and winter-like conditions would ensue. In the film, characters are snowed upon while walking outside. After the show was aired there was a group of scientists that talked about it. I remember Carl Sagan was one, and he said a nuclear winter would last much longer than it did in the show.

Finally, there's also an exchange between two characters, one character that wants to know who started the war, and another character responds: "What difference does that make?" That pretty much sums it up.

TOP SECRET topics include:

Red Dawn (1984)
All the King's Horses (1953/1991)
The Facts Rebel (1964)
The Day After (1983)
Amerika (1987)



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See trailers of *Amerika* and *Red Dawn*,
and part of *The Day After*.

Red Dawn (1984)

Do you ever watch a movie over and over again? Presumably this is because you like the movie. And then there are always guilty pleasures: movies that you think you shouldn't like (or more honestly, that you don't want others to think you like). For the sophisticated, this might include enjoying movies like *Caddyshack*, while for the cynical this might include movies like *Sleepless in Seattle*.

But have you ever watched a movie over and over again because a person in a position of authority made you watch the movie over and over again? That was my experience with the 1984 movie *Red Dawn*. In high school I had a drafting shop class where we drew representations of objects on drafting tables (go figure). Sometimes my teacher put on the radio while we drew, but often the class couldn't agree what station we should listen to. That's where my teacher's VHS copy of *Red Dawn* fit in.

Here's what *Red Dawn* is all about: World War III has started because the Soviet Union and its communist allies have invaded America. More striking, a small number of high school students have begun a guerilla campaign against the occupiers. They start out with weapons like hunting rifles, but after capturing armaments from the communists, they quickly accelerate to using gear like

In comparing Paloczi-Horvath's vision to the realities of contemporary society, it's interesting to see that television is still a major whipping boy. The sex and violence on TV desensitizes people and makes them harsh go the critics, and this is likely true. Yet, what makes *The Facts Rebel* truly intriguing is that at least one leading thinker believed that people would become bored with TV, spelling the end of consumer culture, and with it America's postwar economic miracle.



Reading futurist books might promote a sense of smugness as one, for example, continues to see how many times Brazil will be designated as the next economic powerhouse. However, *The Facts Rebel* was quite accurate in its predictions compared to its futurist counterparts. Unlike many books in this field at the time *The Facts Rebel* did not simply extrapolate from a couple of contemporary phenomenon and take a shot in the dark as to what year the Soviet Union would collapse or achieve total world domination. As a final point, consider that one author in 1983 saw the Soviet Union having an army larger than all other nations' armies combined by 1990- he was probably the guy that wrote the grant proposal for the Star Wars defense system!

The "New Class," the vast majority of people living in the West, will not have to wait until 1980 or 1990 to see the fruits of their economic system. Palocz-Horvath writes: "The very short work week- thirty hours in the near future, later twenty-five or even twenty- will furnish so much leisure that communal activities, together with intelligent attention to political affairs, will help to fill out interestingly a part of one's free time." He argues that "with the rise of the general education level, local politics, electioneering, and party campaigns are also apt to become more objective and more rational."

However, Palocz-Horvath does see a few clouds on the horizon, especially due to the growing influence of television. He realizes a problem, in that people are becoming increasingly bored watching the same kinds of Westerns and soap operas. He echoes the fears of John Kenneth Gailbrath in that television watching will lead to desensitization. Palocz-Horvath believes that the uncontrolled saturation of advertising will resort to the "problem of creating sufficient wants." In other words, if the Madison Avenue advertisers don't keep effectively plugging products, consumers won't keep consuming, and it might bring to its knees.



rocket-propelled grenade (RPG) launchers in their attacks. During the course of the movie, it's revealed that America's only allies are the English plus "600 million screaming Chinamen." (You see, about half a billion Chinese people- or "Chinamen"- have been offed.)

The young guerillas include Charlie Sheen, C. Thomas Howell, as well as *Dirty Dancers* Patrick Swayze and Jennifer Grey. One notable scene is C. Thomas Howell raising his gun above his head and shouting "Wolverines!" Here he's invoking the high school team name, the Wolverines.



Back to my high school: the shop teacher played the tape constantly- what's best is that he fast-forwarded through dialogue so that we could see the violent scenes within the timeframe of the class.

Even after I graduated high school I would watch *Red Dawn* during the many times it was shown on the cable channel TBS. I guess I'm no better than Pavlov's dogs in deciding what's rewarding. You might think I would have eventually memorized the dialogue, but I didn't learn it. At least my teacher modeled for me what to do in case of an invasion- would you know how to operate a RPG launcher after stealing one?

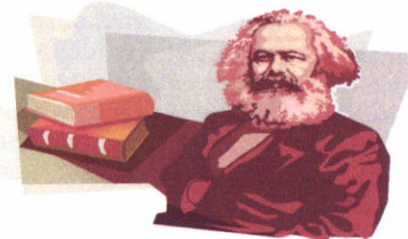
Years ago I talked about *Red Dawn* in an ironic kind of way. One guy responded that he couldn't understand why I would think of the movie as camp. I didn't know if he thought I should take it seriously because he was a conservative that took such a takeover seriously, or that he thought I should be horrified that others took this propaganda seriously. Since then a few TV shows have also made light of the movie.

In the *Scrubs* episode "My Heavy Meddle" (2002), Turk tells Elliot he has rented *Red Dawn* and Elliot responds by lifting her hands above her head and exclaiming "Wolverines!" Plus, Elliot asks Turk what aspect of the movie is more unbelievable: C. Thomas Howell being a bad ass or the Russians invading Michigan. Turk responds with "Both." (*Red Dawn* took place in Colorado. The mix-up may lie in the fact that The University of Michigan has the wolverine for its team name.)

In the *My Name is Earl* episode "South of the Border" (2007), Earl encounters a Mexican bandit who only had cable TV throughout the 1980s, and thus many of his cultural touchstones to America are old. At the end of the episode, the bandit fires his guns into the air and yells "Wolverines!" Thus, my gift to you, when someone acts unduly boastful you can say: "That's so C. Thomas Howell - *Red Dawn*".

earlier denounced cybernetics as something akin to heresy. If the United States does not move forward into scientific research and applications Paloczi-Horvath can see how Khrushchev will indeed bury the West.

According to Marx, the wealth of society was measured not by the amount of working time but by the free time of its workers: "Leisure means not only time for rest but also the space for development of everyone's personality." In the chapter "The Soviet Nineteen-Nineties" Paloczi-Horvath is skeptical of the 1961 Party-line assertion that from the 1980s onward the Soviet workweek will be less than 20 hours. Especially since the State is to wither away by that time, but the Party paradoxically will be stronger than ever.



The chapter "The West in the Nineteen Nineties" is much more optimistic in tone. Paloczi-Horvath foresees the establishment of a "New Class" as part of an "Effortless Society". Instead of using "cradle to grave", English resident Paloczi-Horvath uses the term "womb to tomb" to discuss what he sees as the further development of the beneficial welfare state.

A review of a futurist book:

The Facts Rebel (1964)

Though not published until 1964, George Paloczi-Horvath's book *The Facts Rebel* was written prior to the Kennedy assassination and so still reflects the optimism of the 1950s and early 1960s.

Paloczi-Horvath maintains that there are three different ways of thinking: the government way, the corporate way, and the scientific way. He differs from Marxists and his contemporary bean counters in his view of the scientific. He believes that government and corporate institutions will eventually adopt the new scientific model: the cybernetic model.

Cybernetics meant the science of high speed computers, electronic brains, and governing machines. The author's central idea is as the First Industrial Revolution made all unskilled human labor superfluous and obsolete, the Second cybernetic revolution was "bound to devalue the human brain at least in its simpler and more routine decisions."

Paloczi-Horvath was a product of his time like every other writer, and he does not warn about a missile gap with the Soviet Union, but rather a "computer gap" or "automation gap." He notes that the "Communist Reformation" under Khrushchev allowed the mathematicians and physicists of the Soviet Union to revolt against the Marxist-Leninist ideologues that had

All The King's Horses (1953 and 1991)

In the mid 80s I embarked on a Kurt Vonnegut reading spree. Okay, it was more like a weekend bender that lasted for years.

One story I particularly enjoyed was *All the Kings Horses* (1953), part of a collection of stories from *Welcome to the Monkey House*. The story concerns an air crash over Asia involving an American military colonel, his wife and two kids, some soldiers, and the two pilots of the airplane. The Americans are captured by an Asian revolutionary leader. The leader is in all probability communist because there is a Russian military advisor at the place where the Americans are being held.

Many of the story characters are archetypal, including the revolutionary leader's disloyal China doll lover— and right out of a WWII army film— a corporal who looks to his sergeant for assurances that everything will turn out okay in the end.



The story's plot is what's ingenious. Basically, the former rich owners of the place where the revolutionary leader is holed up had created a giant chess board with life-size pieces. The revolutionary

leader forces the colonel to play a game of chess, although the colonel's pieces are substituted with the real American hostages. Whenever the colonel loses a "piece", the person is taken out and shot.

In time, the Russian military advisor addresses the colonel to the significance of what has occurred on that day. While writing about the advisor in a somewhat mainstream way, Vonnegut still offers a hope of overcoming the differences between East and West. I believe Vonnegut's refusal to convey a complete cookie-cutter image of the Russian is a window into his future work, when compared to the thinking of others, he offered up Germans during WWII as more ordinary and less monstrous.



The idea of a sympathetic adversary is also evident in the 1991 remake of *All The King's Horses*, one of four short stories from the video *Kurt Vonnegut's Monkey House*. Instead, there's a Latin American revolutionary, and the colonel is replaced by the American ambassador to the country. The plot is basically the same.

There's a focus on political ideology and repercussions it has on the "pieces". During the game the ambassador confers with the ranking military hostage about strategy so that the viewer is aware of the workings of the ambassador's mind.

In several ways the 1991 update is superior. The characters are better drawn, with greater tension between them. Plus, the ending is more significant. If you can't find the video but want to know more like the final twist, just shoot me an email.

* * *

On a lighter note, consider this scene from the film *A Fish Called Wanda* (1988). This part is an exchange between an upper-crust Englishwoman named Wendy, and an obnoxious American named Otto who rankles at being considered unintelligent.

Otto: "Don't call me stupid."

Wendy: "Why on earth not?"

Otto: "Oh, you English are so superior, aren't you? Well, would you like to know what you'd be without us, the good ol' U.S. of A. to protect you? I'll tell you. The smallest fucking province in the Russian Empire, that's what! So don't call me stupid, lady. Just thank me."

